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AUTHOR Johnson, Berman E.
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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine why applicants to the DeKalb Area Vocational-Technical School did not show up for admissions testing and enrollment or did not complete programs which they began. The study identified four groups of non-completers: "no shows" (i.e., applicants who failed to report for admissions testing); "test outs" (i.e., applicants who took the admissions test but did not enroll); "fade outs" (i.e., applicants who failed to post satisfactory admissions test scores, who were accepted after a second testing, and who did not later enroll in a program); and "dropouts" (i.e., students who dropped out after enrollment). Personal interviews were conducted with 378 of the 765 students who were identified as belonging to one of the four categories. Study findings, based on interviews with 147 (46%) of the "no shows," 22 (50%) of the "test outs," 31 (74%) of the "fade outs," and 178 (50%) of the "dropouts," revealed: (1) 32% of all respondents failed to enroll or complete their program because of job conflicts, 21% lost interest, 12% enrolled elsewhere, 9% had academic deficiencies, and 7% had family conflicts; (2) among "no shows," reasons for not enrolling were job conflicts (32%), enrollment elsewhere (14%), and loss of interest (13%); (3) among "test outs," 45% had job conflicts, 23% lost interest, and 14% had academic deficiencies; (4) of the "fade outs," 26% had job conflicts and 23% lost interest; and (5) 28% of the "dropouts" had job conflicts and 24% lost interest. Interview questionnaires are appended. (HB)

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The DeKalb Tech Retention Study

Berman E. Johnson, Director
Office of Research and Planning
DeKalb Area Vocational-Technical School

DeKalb Community College
Clarkston, Georgia 30021

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Abstract

The retention study sought to determine the reasons why some DeKalb Tech applicants and students do not persist with viable efforts in admissions testing, enrollment, and retention. A population of 765 was subdivided into NO SHOWS, TEST OUTS, FADE OUTS, and DROP OUTS noted during a portion of FY 1984. Each was telephoned for an interview which asked why they did not persist in their educational efforts at DeKalb Tech.

The 378 usable responses were noted to be in 10 categories, the most prominent of which were Job Conflicts (32 percent), Lost Interest (21 percent), and Enrolled Elsewhere (12 percent). NO SHOWS and DROP OUTS accounted for 86 percent of the responses. The responses indicated that several emerging socio-economic factors and conditions influence applicants' persistence towards enrollment, as well as students' ability to complete a program of study.

It was recommended that more flexible hours and better professional support be strategically provided for applicants and students. This includes a personal response made to all applicants, continued staff development for coping with emerging enrollment trends, and innovative student recruitment efforts utilizing radio and television advertising.

"The DeKalb Tech Retention Study"

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the reasons that some applicants to DeKalb Area Vocational-Technical School, the occupational unit of DeKalb Community College, do not persist with viable efforts in admissions testing, enrollment, and retention. Conducted by the Office of Research and Planning, the study was prompted by faculty and administrators who were concerned that applications to DeKalb Tech were duly and efficiently processed. Dwindling enrollments for the Spring and Summer quarters of 1984 and dismal enrollment projections for Fall Quarter 1984 were at the heart of this concern.

Statement of the Problem

During a school year large numbers of persons apply to DeKalb Tech, lesser numbers show up for admissions testing and enrollment, and even fewer numbers complete a program of studies. These numbers are impacted by a program admissions procedure which strives to satisfy various entry requirements as well as individual needs of applicants. Moreover, these numbers are influenced by: (1) various program entry dates, (2) admissions test anxieties, (3) Developmental Studies requirements, (4) dual (Collegiate/DeKalb Tech) enrollment, and (5) high program entry standards.

When entry-level jobs are less plentiful in the economy, DeKalb Tech program admissions are mitigated by a larger volume of applications and subsequent enrollments. Accepted applicants at that time are often put on a standby list for enrollment because of filled programs. But when entry-level jobs are more

plentiful in the economy, applicants are fewer in number. DeKalb Tech admissions then experience program starts with a lesser number of students, and student retention becomes an area of greater concern. Since the need for skilled persons does not diminish when entry-level jobs are more plentiful, and the lack of technicians and highly trained persons persists despite the pretentions of the economy, DeKalb Tech's challenge is to recruit, enroll, and retain quality applicants during prosperous times as well as during lean times.

Elements of DeKalb Tech Admissions

Various program entry dates reflect the nature of DeKalb Tech's 36 different programs whose content ranges from three quarters in some to seven quarters in others. Vocational-technical programming logistics sometimes prevent program starts every quarter. On the other hand, some areas have program starts weekly. These conditions limit efforts to categorically compare the number of enrollments to the number of applications in a given quarter.

Admissions test anxieties

Despite efforts by test administrators to alleviate fears in diagnostic testing and student placement, admissions test anxieties sometimes prevent applicants from scoring in the range necessary for program acceptance. This perception is held for those who apply in programs requiring lower test scores as well as for those who apply in programs requiring higher test scores. Some applicants become frustrated and do not avail themselves of second test options. Others do not seek admissions counseling which can make exceptions for test score deficiencies. It is postulated that these persons do not vigorously pursue program admissions unless they are given

more personalized service by admissions specialists or faculty.

Developmental studies requirements

Deficient admissions test scores sometimes lead to recommendations for applicants to enroll in Developmental Studies. DeKalb Tech's wide range of services administer to student deficiencies as low as the six grade level. Some students take advantage of this remediation in order to correct notable academic deficiencies. Others resent having to repeat high school courses for which they have posted a passing grade, and are purported to pursue less vigorous efforts towards program enrollment.

Dual enrollment

Dual enrollment in the collegiate and in the DeKalb Tech units of DeKalb Community College can be an asset. However, it is not without problems of articulation affecting program retention for some enrolled students. Collegiate class times sometimes conflict with the more necessarily rigid, sequential, DeKalb Tech class times. Sometimes DeKalb Tech students appear to have withdrawn from a program, but are taking required courses in the collegiate unit. Duplication in major areas also leads to confusion for some students who have identified studies in career-occupational education.

Application fees

Some faculty and administrators view DeKalb Tech's lack of an application fee as further complication for program admissions. Arguments in favor of an application fee contend that it screens out applicants with less serious intentions about enrollment, and directs admissions planning and operations to more serious applicants. Arguments against an application fee contend that it reduces the pool of applicants at the expense of those who cannot afford it, and slows down the admissions procedure with the

handling of student monies. A survey conducted by Marietta-Cobb Vocational-Technical School in March 1983 showed that 18 Georgia voc-tech schools required an application fee while 10 others did not (Saunders, B. personal communication; June 21, 1984). However, the literature shows no empirical evidence that application fees are a factor in influencing enrollment in postsecondary education. Decisions for or against application fees are usually generated by administrative judgements made in individual institutions.

Definition of Retention

Retention in this study is defined as the sustained interest of applicants and the persistence of students at DeKalb Tech as they make progress towards a full-time day program completion. It identifies four groups most noted by DeKalb Tech admissions personnel in concerns for student retention:

1. NO SHOWS - applicants who failed to report for initial admissions testing.
2. TEST OUTS - applicants who were accepted after testing but who did not later enroll in a program.
3. FADE OUTS - applicants who failed to post satisfactory admissions test scores, who were accepted after a second testing, and who did not later enroll in a program.
4. DROP OUTS - students who dropped out after enrollment.

Basic Question and Limitations

The study posed the following basic question: What are the reasons that some DeKalb Tech applicants do not persist with viable efforts in admissions testing, enrollment, and retention in full time day programs? The study was limited to DeKalb Tech Spring and Summer Quarter 1984 NO SHOWS and TEST OUTS, and also to FADE OUTS and DROP OUTS noted from July 1, 1983 to July 1, 1984.

Review of Related Literature

The related literature describes retention studies mostly in areas outside postsecondary vocational-technical education. However, much of it relates to all postsecondary education. Vaughn (1983) reports several items which correlated with dropout and retention. Six of those items which appear to apply for students in postsecondary vocational-technical institutions are as follows:

Correlated Positively With Retention	Correlated Positively With Dropout
1. Part-time jobs (up to 20 hours)	1. Full-time job
2. Frequent interaction with faculty	2. Low-levels of contact with faculty
3. Good high school grades	3. Poor high school grades
4. Religious background	4. No religious preference
5. Being a non-smoker	5. Smoking cigarettes
6. Oriental or Jewish parents	6. Protestant parents

Project STAY (Scholarships To Able Youth) of San Antonio, Texas provides outreach services to help young people stay in school beyond secondary education (Smith, 1972). STAY involves parents in the process of aiding their children's retention, and recruits students (low achievers and high achievers) from economically deprived families. Among some of their services are: (1) instigating new ways of looking at entrance examinations; (2) seeking scholarships, grants, and financial aid; and (3) providing extensive information on educational opportunities.

In a study involving 1,576 students in 50 proprietary and public voc-tech schools in San Francisco, Chicago, Miami, and Boston, Wilms (1980) concluded that proprietary schools are more efficient in retaining students. However, the study failed to consider that proprietary school students and public school students

apply with different financial orientations and commitments, and therefore are not necessarily appropriate for such comparisons. Moreover, in another study Erwin (1975) found that most proprietary schools do not directly compete with public institutions for student enrollment. However, the Carnegie Council (1980) concludes that if public institutions are going to minimize the impact of proprietary schools they must explore alternatives to enrollment declines. Such alternatives include the increased enrollment of persons 25 years old and over, part-time students, females, minorities, and foreign students.

A disproportionate number of voc-tech students come from families where neither parent experienced postsecondary education. Bilson and Terry (1982) found that since first-generation college students are less likely to be involved in campus organizations, to meet or pursue their most important friendships on campus, or to work on campus, they have lower levels of persistence to complete a program of studies. They conclude that since first-generation students are making a longer jump from the social status of their parents than are second-generation students, institutions must do more to assist first-generation students. This includes encouraging--or even requiring-- participation in on-campus events and activities, providing more on-campus work-study situations, and providing specific counseling and peer support mechanisms which can lead to better student retention.

Methodology

The four groups of retention in this study identified applicants who either did not show up for testing or enrollment, and students who dropped out of a DeKalb Tech Program. The applicants and students identified within the limitations of the study totaled

765, and were noted as the population. Each was telephoned to be interviewed by personnel in the Office of Research and Planning. The basic interview statements for each of the four groups are found in the Appendix. It can be seen that the central questions for the four groups were as follows:

NO SHOWS - Would you tell us why you did not show up for testing purposes?

TEST OUTS and FADE OUTS - Would you tell us why you did not enroll in the program?

DROP OUTS - Would you tell us why you withdrew from the program?

Results and Discussion

Repeated efforts to contact the population were limited by a variety of reasons which included incorrect student status noted, wrong numbers given, disconnected telephones, and persons who had moved to another address. The 378 usable responses, noted as the sample for the study, were numbered as follows:

GROUP	POPULATION	RESPONSES	PERCENT
NO SHOWS	322	147	46%
TEST OUTS	44	22	50%
FADE OUTS	42	31	74%
DROP OUTS	357	178	50%
TOTALS	765	378	49%

The 378 responses were distributed in 10 categories as shown in Figure 1. It can be seen that 119 respondents (32 percent) were in the Job Conflicts Category. This included 30 NO SHOWS and 44 DROP OUTS who became employed after applying to DeKalb Tech, and 21 NO SHOWS and six DROP OUTS whose working hours changed after applying. All four groups had larger numbers in this Category. Many of these respondents reported that their earnings were too

large for them to be eligible for grant assistance, and yet to small for their subsistence while attending a full-time day program. No respondent reported a lack of knowledge about student financial assistance.

Figure No. 1. Category Distribution of the Respondents

CATEGORY	RESPONDENTS	PERCENT
Job Conflicts	119	32
Lost Interest	81	21
Enrolled Elsewhere	44	12
Academic Deficiencies	34	9
Family Conflicts	28	7
Student Relocations	22	6
Insufficient Student Information	20	5
Health Difficulties	12	3
Instructor Conflicts	11	3
Transportation Difficulties	7	2
TOTAL	378	100

The 81 Lost Interest respondents included 27 NO SHOWS whose interest waned during the initial stages of applying to DeKalb Tech, and 22 DROP OUTS whose persistence attitudes changed during the pursuance of their studies. It also included 20 DROP OUTS who reported that they had intentions to continue their programs later, but were taking the Summer Quarter off for vacation purposes. These vacationers did not duly inform DeKalb Tech of their quasi-student status, and they did not consider themselves as program dropouts.

The 44 Enrolled Elsewhere respondents included 10 who had transferred to the collegiate unit of DeKalb Community College. But 24 were respondents who changed their choice of institution in the application stages, and 10 were DROP OUTS.

Academic Deficiencies accounted for 34 respondents, 25 of which were DROP OUTS. Also included were six NO SHOWS and three TEST OUTS who indicated that they did not wish to pursue Developmental Studies options for program entry. However, only one respondent, a DROP OUT, reported Developmental Studies as a deterrent to their persistence.

Family Conflicts accounted for 28 respondents who reported circumstances such as pregnancies and marriage separations as reasons for lack of persistence. NO SHOWS and DROP OUTS each accounted for 12 respondents in this Category.

Student Relocations accounted for 22 respondents who moved to another geographical area for personal reasons.

Respondents in the Insufficient Student Information Category were noted among all groups accept DROP OUTS. But only three respondents reported to not have received mailed information for registration and enrollment. The remaining 15 NO SHOWS and two TEST OUTS indicated that they either did not understand the information provided to them, or that the information was not made available to them.

Health Difficulties were more prevalent among DROP OUTS, and included respondents who had accidents or ailments developed since their application to DeKalb Tech.

Only 11 respondents (3 percent) reported to have Instructor Conflicts. This is an indication that teacher-student relations is not a prominent factor affecting DeKalb Tech student retention. However, nine DROP OUTS took issue with some instructors' methods of teaching in an adult classroom.

The seven respondents in the Transportation Difficulties Category were mostly NO SHOWS reporting delays from stalled cars en route to the test site. NO respondents reported to be without access to public transportation. Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5 respectively indicate category distribution of NO SHOWS, TEST OUTS, FADE OUTS, and DROP OUTS separately

Figure No. 2. Category Distribution of NO SHOWS

CATEGORY	RESPONDENTS	PERCENT
Job Conflicts	51	32
Enrolled Elsewhere	21	14
Lost Interest	27	13
Insufficient Student Information	15	9
Family Conflicts	12	7
Student Relocations	7	4
Academic Deficiencies	6	5
Transportation Difficulties	5	3
Health Difficulties	3	2
Instructor Conflicts	0	0
TOTAL	147	100

Figure No. 3. Category Distribution of TEST OUTS

CATEGORY	RESPONDENTS	PERCENT
Job Conflicts	10	45
Lost Interest	5	23
Academic Deficiencies	3	14
Enrolled Elsewhere	2	9
Insufficient Student Information	2	9
Family Conflicts	0	0
Student Relocations	0	0
Health Difficulties	0	0
Instructor Conflicts	0	0
Transportation Difficulties	0	0
TOTAL	22	100

Figure No. 4. Category Distribution of FADE OUTS

CATEGORY	RESPONDENTS	PERCENT
Job Conflicts	8	26
Lost Interest	7	23
Family Conflicts	4	13
Enrolled Elsewhere	4	13
Insufficient Student Information	3	10
Student Relocations	2	6
Instructor Conflicts	2	6
Health Difficulties	1	3
Academic Deficiencies	0	0
Transportation Difficulties	0	0
TOTAL	31	100

Figure No. 5. Category Distribution of DROP OUTS

CATEGORY	RESPONDENTS	PERCENT
Job Conflicts	50	28
Lost Interest	42	24
Academic Deficiencies	25	14
Enrolled Elsewhere	17	10
Student Relocations	13	7
Family Conflicts	12	6
Instructor Conflicts	9	5
Health Difficulties	8	4
Transportation Difficulties	2	1
Insufficient Student Information	0	0
TOTAL	178	100

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is concluded that the large number of respondents (32 percent) who reported Job Conflicts as a reason for lack of persistence at DeKalb Tech is confirmation of trends being established in many parts of the country. For various reasons, applicants and students with short-term educational goals (two year postsecondary and less) are increasingly committed to employment as they pursue their

studies. Prominent among these reasons is a multi-shift oriented labor force, and family economic conditions which encourage students to work during their program training. Job Conflicts as a deterrent to student retention may be more prevalent in metropolitan areas. Like proprietary schools which readily adjust to such student preferences and conditions, DeKalb Tech should move to accommodate more part-time efforts made in full-time day programs, and also more full program efforts made on a part-time basis during the evening and Saturday hours. This tenet may have to be considered as state accountability measures impact categorical funding for postsecondary vocational-technical education.

NO SHOWS

Since the number of NO SHOWS is affected by the application fee policy, DeKalb Tech must wisely consider if an application fee is appropriate while the collegiate unit of DeKalb Community College does not require it. It should be noted that other Georgia vocational-technical schools which have no direct affiliation with a collegiate unit, have found favorable results in their admissions efforts which include application fees.

More personalized directives and support for applicants as they make progress towards enrollment can decrease the number who become NO SHOWS. Many respondents expressed appreciation for this study's inquiry about their lack of persistence, and forthwith initiated new efforts for program enrollment. Such efforts will necessitate a lower student-counselor ratio, and a closer articulation of efforts made by admissions and instructional personnel.

The gamut of stumbling blocks which confuse some applicants making progress towards enrollment should be strategically addressed, and suitable action taken to encourage applicants' persistence for program enrollment. It is recommended that this action include a personal letter from the admissions office sent to all DeKalb Tech applicants, followed by a personal telephone call made by department chairpersons or program instructors. Both of these contacts should welcome the new applicant and volunteer professional services which can smooth a path to viable enrollment and retention at DeKalb Tech.

TEST OUTS and FADE OUTS

The number of TEST OUTS and FADE OUTS identified in this study (22 and 31) are insufficient to make any sweeping conclusions. But it should be noted that these 53 respondents (14 percent) were accepted in programs but did not show up for enrollment. This is further confirmation, especially among FADE OUTS, that increased professional support and encouragement is needed in the application stages of DeKalb Tech admissions. It also emphasizes the need for more flexible postsecondary vocational-technical program offerings.

DROP OUTS

It is recommended that better student records are maintained for all groups noted in this study, especially for DROP OUTS. Although state accountability measures note DROP OUTS as former students who failed to complete a program and those enrolled with less than 11 quarter credit hours, DeKalb Tech must better differentiate for those who are taking a quarter off and for those who for good reasons are taking a lesser class load. Better

identification of these persons as students continuing their education -- perhaps more sporadically than what is administratively desirable--can facilitate better curriculum planning, classroom logistics, and instructor assignments.

Although Instructor Conflicts received a low response from DROP OUTS in this study, 47 percent of the DROP OUTS lost interest, enrolled elsewhere, or had academic deficiencies. This presents a challenge to admission and instructional personnel. Admissions personnel are called to recruit better students into DeKalb Tech programs, and yet provide counsel with suitable alternatives for applicants who do not measure up to DeKalb Tech program admissions standards. On the other hand, faculty must have continued development to better cope with an enrollment of older persons who are part-time,females, minorities, and foreign students. All DeKalb Tech personnel however, are charged to maintain a rewarding social/psychological environment which delivers high quality educational experiences for students.

In summary, the recommendations emerging from this study can be listed as follows:

1. More flexible hours for students who seek full program credentials made in schedules other than six hours per day, five days per week.
2. An evaluation of the pros and cons of an application fee.
3. More personalized directives and professional support for applicants and students.
4. Closer articulation between admissions and instructional personnel which seek to improve student retention in all stages.
5. A personal welcoming letter sent to all new applicants from admissions personnel.

6. A personal telephone call to all new applicants made by the department chairperson or the program instructor which volunteers support through the application stages.

7. The development of more precise student records better defining the stages of student retention.

8. Continued staff development for admissions and instructional personnel enabling them to better cope with new and emerging enrollment trends in postsecondary education.

9. The development of innovative marketing techniques for student recruitment with better utilization of radio and television advertising.

Appendix

Telephone Questionnaire for NO SHOWS

Hello. May I speak to _____. My name is_____and I am calling from DeKalb Community College. The records show that you applied to DeKalb Tech's _____program, but you did not show up for testing. Is that correct?

We are concerned that proper service was given to you and your application. Would you share with us the reason that you did not test for enrollment in the program? We need this information in order to better serve our students. Please be assured that your answer will be held in strict confidence. Would you tell us why you did not show up for testing purposes?

Thank you for your cooperation. Your answer has been very helpful, and we hope that you will consider DeKalb Tech again in your career development.
(Category Response No._ ___).

Telephone Questionnaire for TEST OUTS

Hello. May I speak to_____. My name is_____and I am calling from DeKalb Community College. The records show that you applied to DeKalb Tech's _____ program, but did not enroll after testing. Is that correct?

We are concerned that proper service was given to you and your application. Would you share with us the reason that you did not enroll in the program? We need this information in order to better serve our students. Please be assured that your answer will be held in strict confidence. Would you tell us why you did not enroll in the program? (Optional Question): Do you know about the alternate test used for entering the program?

Thank you for your cooperation. Your answer has been very helpful, and we hope that you will consider DeKalb Tech again in your career development.
(Category Response No.____).

Telephone Questionnaire for FADE OUTS

Hello. May I speak to_____. My name is_____and I am calling from DeKalb Community College. The records show that after testing you were recommended to enroll in DeKalb Tech's _____program. However, it also shows that you did not enroll in the program. Is that correct?

We are concerned that proper service was given to you and your application. Would you share with us the reason you did not enroll in the program? We need this information in order to better serve our students. Please be assured that your answer will be held in strict confidence. Would you tell us why you did not enroll in the program?

Thank you for your cooperation. Your answer has been very helpful and we hope that you will consider DeKalb Tech again in your career development.
(Category Response No._____)

Telephone Questionnaire for DROP OUTS

Hello. May I speak to _____. My name is _____ and I am calling from DeKalb Community College. The records show that you have withdrawn from DeKalb Tech's _____ program. Is that correct?

Would you share with us the reason that you withdrew from the program? We need this information in order to better serve our students. Please be assured that your answer will be held in strict confidence. Would you tell us the reason why you withdrew from the program?

Thank you for your cooperation. Your answer has been very helpful, and we hope that you will consider DeKalb Tech again in your career development.

(Category Response No._____)

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